

Institute regular contact at all levels in Washington with representatives of the Polisario Front, in order to strengthen the United States' evenhanded position with respect to the Western Sahara; and

Encourage the parties to allow independent international observers, including human rights organizations, to monitor the situation in the territory and observe the referendum process.

The ongoing crisis in the Western Sahara raises serious questions regarding the Government of Morocco's willingness to honor its international commitment to a free and fair referendum in the Western Sahara. This amendment would make clear our government's support for the U.N. peace process and America's commitment to the principles of sovereignty and self-determination.

I urge my colleagues to join us in enacting this timely and important measure.

SENATOR KENNEDY CALLS FOR GREATER PROGRESS ON WESTERN SAHARA REFERENDUM

Senator Edward M. Kennedy today praised the Senate for calling for greater progress on a long-stalled referendum on self-determination for the people of the Western Sahara.

Since 1988, the United Nations has sought to organize a free, fair, and open referendum in the Western Sahara, the former Spanish colony that Morocco has illegally occupied since 1975.

Kennedy said, "A solution to the conflict over the Western Sahara will enhance security and stability in Northern Africa. After more than ten years of delay, the people of the Western Sahara should be permitted to determine for themselves who will govern them."

Kennedy, Republican Senator Gordon Smith, and Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy sponsored an amendment accepted by the Senate on the State Department Reauthorization Bill to require the State Department to report on progress on the referendum. The bill, including the Western Sahara amendment, was passed by the Senate yesterday.

The International Court of Justice, the Organization of African Unity, the United States, and many other nations throughout the world have not recognized Morocco's claim to the Western Sahara, but Morocco's occupation continues. Tens of thousands of the Sahrawi people languish in refugee camps in southern Algeria and have been denied the opportunity to determine their own future.

A UN referendum was originally scheduled for 1992. It has since been delayed many times, primarily due to the resistance of the Government of Morocco. The referendum is now scheduled for July 2000.

In the 1997 Houston Accords, achieved under the leadership of former Secretary of State James Baker, and in a UN plan last December, the international community called for the conclusion of the voter registration process and a referendum. Morocco subsequently agreed to allow the referendum to occur by July 2000.

Senator Kennedy praised the Administration's efforts to resolve this longstanding dispute. He urged the State Department to make it clear to both parties to this dispute that the United States expects the people of the Western Sahara to be allowed to exercise their right to self-determination in a free, fair, and open referendum by July 2,000.

"Morocco has been a faithful ally of the United States for more than 200 years," said Kennedy, "but its refusal to allow the people of the Western Sahara to determine their own political future undercuts America's efforts to promote democracy worldwide."

The Kennedy-Smith-Leahy amendment requires the State Department to report on

January 1, 2000 and again on June 1—2000 on specific steps being taken by the Government of Morocco and by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO) to ensure a free, fair, and open referendum by July 2000 for the people of the Western Sahara to choose between independence and integration with Morocco.

The State Department reports will include a description of preparations for the referendum and the extent to which free access to the territory will be guaranteed for independent and international organizations, including election observers and international media. Human rights organizations and other international organizations must also be permitted to observe the referendum.

In addition, the reports will include a description of current efforts by the Department of State to ensure that the referendum will be held, and an assessment of the likelihood that the July 2000 date will be met.

The reports will also include a description of obstacles, if any, to the voter registration process and other preparations for the referendum and efforts being made: by the parties and the United States Government to overcome those obstacles. Finally, the reports will include an assessment of progress being made in the repatriation process.

(Purpose: To require reports with respect to the holding of a referendum on Western Sahara)

On page 115; after line 18, add the following new section:

SEC. —. REPORTS WITH RESPECT TO A REFERENDUM ON WESTERN SAHARA.

(a) REPORTS REQUIRED.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than each of the dates specified in paragraph (2) the Secretary of State shall submit a report to the appropriate Congressional committees describing specific steps being taken by the Government of Morocco and by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLIS—RIO) to ensure that a referendum in which the people of the Western Sahara will choose between independence and integration with Morocco will be held by March 2000.

(2) DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSION OF REPORTS.—The dates referred to in paragraph (1) are November 1, 1999, and February 1, 2000.

(b) REPORT ELEMENTS.—The report shall include—

(1) a description of preparations for the referendum,

(2) a description of current efforts by the Department of State to ensure that a referendum will be held by March 2000;

(3) an assessment of the likelihood that the March 2000 date will be met,

(4) a description of obstacles, if any, to the voter-registration process and other preparations for the referendum, and efforts being made by the parties and the United States Government to overcome those obstacles;

(5) an assessment of progress being made in the repatriation process; and

STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY ON IDS MEETING WITH KING MOHAMMED VI OF MOROCCO

I welcome this opportunity to meet with the King. I have great respect for his leadership, and I wished him well in his important responsibilities, and in maintaining close ties between our nations.

A particular issue I discussed with the King was the United Nations referendum on the Western Sahara.

Morocco gained the respect of the international community when it agreed in 1991 and again in 1997 to allow a referendum on

the future of the Western Sahara. These actions demonstrated an impressive commitment to the right of self-determination for the people of the Western Sahara.

The referendum is an important part of the peace process, and I hope that it will take place as soon as possible.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, let me conclude by saying that other things were happening too. When you think about countries, I often said Africa is the forgotten continent. I can remember so well back when they were talking about taking our troops into Bosnia and then later Kosovo, the excuse they were using—this is back in the Clinton administration—they were saying it was ethnic cleansing taking place there. I said on the Senate floor standing at this podium—this is way back in the late nineties—I said for every person who has been ethnically cleansed in Bosnia, there are hundreds on any given day in any Western Africa country. But people did not care about it. Senator Kennedy did.

I know this is a little bit sensitive subject, but even to this day, right now, every other week, there is a group of people, staff people, who get together. They have nothing in common except a heart for Africa. There are liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans. They meet every other week, in Senator Kennedy's office and then in my office, and they pray for Africa. This is something about Senator Kennedy people did not know. That is something that takes place even to this date.

I have a letter written recently by Lindsey Gilchrist of Senator Kennedy's office:

I know Senator Kennedy and Senator Inhofe had always been thought of as the bipartisan leaders on this issue. The Africa prayer group was not something Senator Kennedy was directly involved in [or Senator Inhofe]—

But they have stimulated and motivated us to do this very thing. That was one of the things that occupied 20 years of Senator Kennedy's time. I feel committed to continuing to work with the people of Western Sahara to try to make that a reality. When that happens, we are going to be able to say—he will be watching down: All right, we finally did it.

Let me share a couple personal experiences I had with Senator Kennedy. One is a little bit humorous. In 2005, the Republicans were in the majority. I was chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee. We did the 2005 transportation reauthorization bill. It was a huge thing. I am a conservative, but this is something we need to be doing in this country, something about infrastructure.

As is always the custom of the Senate, as the Chair is well aware, when we pass a big bill, we stand on the floor and thank all the staff people and talk about the significance of it and how important it is.

We had just passed the bill when I was getting ready to make my speech about what a great job we did when the